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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001467

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR COMBATANT COMMANDER CENTRAL

COMMAND TRIP TO BAHRAIN 26 SEPTEMBER 2004

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (S) General Abizaid, we look forward to seeing you in Bahrain. We have asked for calls on the King, Crown Prince, and the Defense Minister apart from your attendance at the Disaster Preparedness Conference. Since your last visit here, the travel warning has been lifted and the DOD Bahrain School reopened, and the detention of the four key terrorist suspects has been extended into October. On September 14, the United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement, only the third agreement we have with an Arab country and the first in the Gulf. Bahrainis, both the government and private citizens, have been delighted by these events, but still apprehensive about the summer events and what they might portend. The King views the NAVCENT presence as indispensable and our relationship has remained strong despite the departure of the Navy dependents.

2. (S) Looking to the period ahead, we continue to apply pressure to the GOB to make sure that the four terrorism suspects remain in jail. There continues to be uncertainty about the future of the Bahrain School and what that means for U.S.-Bahraini relations. Bahrainis worry about the future of the Navy presence and the continued departure status of Navy dependents. They have questions about how the Naval Support Activity in Bahrain will fit into the overall U.S. military presence in the region. They are aware of the global defense posture review, and that the Navy is evaluating issues such as the school, the status of dependents, and the U.S. military's future footprint in Bahrain and the region. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar expressed to the Ambassador September 22 his concern that any evaluation of the Navy's future in Bahrain should reiterate a commitment to Bahrain, and not represent a diminution of the U.S. presence. The events of the summer generated uncertainty among the Bahraini government and Bahraini citizens about the strength and permanence of our commitment.

3. (S) Iraq. The GOB is hopeful we will succeed in stabilizing Iraq and restarting its economy. The Government understands the need to establish security in Iraq and fears the potential regional impact of any deterioration in the situation. They fear above all massive instability in Iraq leading to a hasty American withdrawal and an Iranian-style Shia revolutionary government that might influence Bahrain's own Shia majority. The government views the U.S. presence in Iraq as absolutely essential to their security. Crown Prince Salman stated in a recent meeting with a visiting Codel that the U.S. must remain steadfast in supporting its troops on the ground so they can get the job done. During your meetings, officials will be interested to hear your views.

4.(S) Bahrain's Shia majority is satisfied that Saddam is gone. Many Bahrainis outside of government are suspicious of American intentions in Iraq, but so far the Government has not taken any actions to indicate it feels particularly constrained in being publicly supportive of us. Bahraini Shia feel an affinity for their fellow sect members in Iraq and are pained by U.S. military actions in Shia areas such as Najaf. They publicly pledge their allegiance to Ayatollah Sistani. At the same time, several Shia leaders have publicly condemned all violence in Iraq, whether by coalition forces or Iraqi elements. Specifically, most Bahraini Shia do not support Muqtada Al Sadr, and many attribute his rise to prominence on his father's reputation and sacrifice.

5. (C) The GOB and the Iraqi Embassy signed a memorandum of understanding September 14 to train 4,000 Iraqis in civil defense. The Bahrainis also have offered technical assistance to help rebuild Iraq's banking sector. The Government does not perceive itself as wealthy enough to offer financial assistance.

6. (S) Bilateral Security Ties: The GOB has accepted the departure of the Navy dependents and our desire for a smaller footprint, but remain hopeful they will return. The decision to keep the DoDDs school open was very well received. However, we need to make a decision as soon as possible concerning the future status of the school's administration. The continued operation of military operations from the base and the presence of NAVCENT headquarters, including the DODEA Bahrain School, are ultimate indicators for the GOB of our military commitment here. Should the basing of the Navy here

ever come into doubt, it will have a significant impact on our relationship. We have a Military Consultative Council meeting scheduled for Feb 2005. This will provide a good forum to review our mil-to-mil programs and set a future course.

17. (S) Coalition Force Contribution: The King offered some naval support to provide security in the Northern Arabian Gulf to Iraq. However, the GOB still awaits a formal request from the IIG before they will deploy their ship(s). The USN has provided an ops/intel brief to the BDF to prepare them for the mission and the BDF now has an LNO at NAVCENT HQ. The GOB decided not to participate with airpower because they did not see a need, and did not offer ground forces in Iraq because they have no deployment or sustainment capabilities. Further, the GOB have indicated they will need a GCC decision supporting ground troops in Iraq before they even consider this option.

18. (S) Foreign Military Financing: Bahrain received USD 24.85 million FMF grant from the FY04 DoS budget. This now brings their FMF total over the past two years to USD 145 million. They have used these funds to purchase a TPS 59 radar (due to arrive late 2006), an infrared countermeasures suite for the head of state's new 747-400 (due in 12 months), the refurbishment of 14 Cobra helicopters and multiple spare cases for all services. Due to the BDF's equipment age increasing and the growing maintenance costs, the BDF sees FMF as an important means to bridge their budget deficits to sustain their readiness.

19. (S) Security: The King and Prime Minister are adamantly determined to maintain security for Americans here. Whenever we make requests for extra security at an event, the police respond immediately and appropriately. As you know, of the six Bahraini extremists who were re-arrested in mid-July, four continue to be held in custody and two of the less threatening subjects were released on September 11. The four men still in custody will have another court hearing on October 16 regarding the case against them. The GOB has kept us informed on the continuing status of this case. They have committed to working with the USG to establish a Counter-Terrorism Operations Center (CTOC) and a Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Center (CTIC) along with openly accepting specialized training for CTOC operators. In addition the Parliament is expected to consider a counter-terrorism law for passage when it reconvenes in mid-October. The law will apply stiff penalties for conspiracy to commit terrorist acts.

110. (S) Democratic Development: Bahrain is a monarchy that in 2002 adopted a constitution reinstating a legislative body with one elected chamber, the first since the early 1970,s. The majority Shia mostly adhered to the call by the Al Wifaq Shia political society to boycott the 2002 parliamentary elections. As a result, those Shia present in the elected lower house of parliament, the Council of Deputies, do not necessarily represent the views of their constituents.

111. (S) During the 2003-04 parliamentary session, the process of presenting and passing legislation ground to a halt. The constitution is unclear about whether the government or the parliament should take the lead role in proposing legislation, and differing interpretations led to a constitutional crisis. In response to protests and a petition drive, the government decided to launch a constitutional dialogue led by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs with leaders from four opposition political societies. In early September, the oppositionists submitted proposed constitutional amendments for the government's consideration. The Minister of Labor announced he would present the government's response in early October. The Government is also encouraging the societies that previously boycotted elections to participate in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

112. (S) Economy: The United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement (FTA) on September 14, marking a new level of commitment in our bilateral economic relationship. Bahrain is the first country in the Gulf region to have an FTA with us, and joins Jordan and Morocco as the only Arab states with FTAs. We hope to use the Bahrain FTA as a springboard to promote economic reform, openness, and transparency in the region, and as an important step in realizing the President's vision of a Middle East Free Trade Area by 2013. Bahrain will cite the FTA as the United States' endorsement of its economy and to market Bahrain as a regional center for finance, insurance, banking, business services, education, and health care.

113. (S) Middle East Peace: The Bahraini government is deeply troubled by the continuing violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Though far from the conflict, Bahrainis identify with the Palestinians. The Crown Prince has told us that he would like to work with the Israeli government, in particular in fending off threats from Iran,

but he cannot do so in the absence of some sort of settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The Crown Prince appreciates that the President has gone far to promote the establishment of an independent, viable Palestinian state, but he has asked that the Administration make a gesture to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people. Flare-ups in violence in the territories transfer directly into heightened emotions among average Bahrainis.

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